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FM AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7727  
INFO RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE  
RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD 0262  
RUEHLB/AMEMBASSY BEIRUT 0538  
RUEHDM/AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS 0831  
RUEHDE/AMCONSUL DUBAI 6651  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ABU DHABI 004328

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/21/2016

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SUBJECT: PRESIDENT KHALIFA SHARES VIEWS ON IRAN, IRAQ, AND  
LEBANON WITH FORMER PRESIDENT BUSH

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Classified by Ambassador Michele J. Sison, reasons 1.4 (b)  
and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: In a cordial meeting with UAE President Khalifa November 21, former President Bush emphasized the strength of bilateral relations and reminisced about cooperation during the liberation of Kuwait and why some regional players had sided with Saddam. Bush inquired about Khalifa's views on Iran, Iraq, Middle East peace, and Lebanon. Khalifa said neighbors are a "fact of geography" and that Iran's nuclear programs caused concern -- with emphasis on potential environmental dangers (citing Chernobyl as a precedent). Khalifa said the Iranian people maintained a reservoir of good will for America after a long history of cooperation and that current difficulties are political, not people-based.

¶2. (C) Summary continued: Khalifa agreed with his visitor that a solution to the Golan Heights issue might "pull Syria out of Iran's orbit," adding that "the heart of the problem in the Middle East remains the Palestinian issue." Khalifa lamented the lack of effective steps taken by the Quartet. On Iraq, Khalifa said "there is a civil war taking place now" and advised accelerated training of the Iraqi police and military, which is "taking too long." Discussing key players in the Lebanon situation, Khalifa said UAE policy was to maintain good relations with all sides -- and all were welcome to visit the UAE, including Hizballah leader Nasrallah. Lebanon was a victim of foreign powers settling scores on its soil, he said, citing the natural beauty and historic role of that nation. On the UAE's cautious steps towards democracy, Khalifa said the nation was moving forward "in compliance with our heritage and customs." End summary.

¶3. (C) Khalifa was very warm in his welcome to the Former U.S. President George H.W. Bush on November 21, noting the close friendship and good relations enjoyed between the two nations. Smiling (as he recalled recent U.S. election results), Khalifa said the UAE cooperated with the American people regardless of the party in power. Mutual interests included military, civil, and oil issues, he noted. Khalifa was joined in the meeting by Minister for Presidential Affairs Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Managing Director of the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority (and Chairman of the Zayed Charitable Foundation) Ahmed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Khalifa's eldest son and member of the Abu Dhabi Executive Council

Sheikh Sultan bin Khalifa Al Nahyan, and other senior sheikhs. President Bush was joined by Ambassador, Bush staff member Jim Appleby, and Embassy note taker.

Recalling the liberation of Kuwait  
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¶4. (C) Responding to Bush's expression of thanks for the UAE's hosting of U.S. Air Force personnel at Al Dhafra Air Base (which Bush had visited the day prior), Khalifa reminisced about the liberation of Kuwait, noting that Saudi Arabia had been hesitant to invite the allies into the region. Former President Zayed had said it was impermissible to have Kuwait occupied by Iraq and moved quickly to welcome U.S. forces -- including through an airport in Al Ain that was not even completed yet (Khalifa noted that the U.S. had used the unfinished runway for cargo flights and refueling aircraft). Bush noted Zayed's unfailing support, to which Khalifa said through his translator that "a friend in need is a friend indeed."

¶5. (C) Asked why Arafat had sided with Saddam in 1990, Khalifa said Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas had told him that PLO founding member Farouq Qaddumi "pushed" Arafat towards that stance. Khalifa suggested that an ulterior motive might have been to side with the potential new powerhouse in the region should Saddam's influence expand even beyond Kuwait. Yemen saw the same potential in siding with Saddam, he said. The two discussed why Jordanian King Hussein took a similar view and had few answers, with Khalifa wondering if the King's health had something to do with the miscalculation, as Hussein was generally known to be wise and moderate.

¶6. (C) Khalifa said Saddam had reportedly sent a message to Iran when he occupied Kuwait that he was "ready to open a new

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page" in relations, as his (Saddam's) "frontiers now stretch to the Hormuz" and beyond. Khalifa recalled telling General Schwartzkopf that the Iraqis were trying to hit Gulf states with missiles but that when they targeted the UAE they aimed the trajectory too high and the missiles fell right back on Iraqi soil!

Iran

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¶7. (C) Asked whether he saw Iran as a concern, Khalifa said the UAE looks at Iran as a neighbor. Neighbors are a fact of geography. Iran has been through various regimes, from the Shah to the mullahs -- leadership decisions are internal matters. Of greater concern to the neighbors is Iran's nuclear program. Khalifa said he had met Iran's National Security Advisor recently and expressed UAE concerns, which he (Khalifa) characterized for Bush as including old Soviet equipment and technology still in use in Iran and stirring up images of Chernobyl. He cited regional repercussions in the event of an accident as one of the UAE's concerns. The Iranian official's reply to these concerns had been comical, said Khalifa, suggesting that the UAE send its nuclear experts to investigate Iranian facilities -- knowing full well that "we don't have any" nuclear experts.

¶8. (C) Khalifa agreed with Bush that the Iranian people "undoubtedly" maintain a reservoir of good will for America after a long history of cooperation (Bush recalled his business dealings with Iran 30 years prior when times were different). Most Iranians are "not hostile" to the U.S., Khalifa suggested, so the current difficulties revolve around politics, not people-to-people disagreements.

Iraq

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¶9. (C) Regarding Iraq's current situation, Khalifa said "a

civil war is ongoing" and the situation is critical. He advised accelerated training of the Iraqi police and military when asked what he would do "if he were President of the U.S. today." Emphasizing the urgency of "proper training of the army and police," which is "taking too long," Khalifa acknowledged that ethnic issues in Iraq intervene to make cohesive training more difficult -- it is "difficult to have truly effective forces." The goal must be, however, to withdraw U.S. forces from populated areas (operating "over the horizon"). President Bush stated that the U.S. was trying to pursue that very goal.

#### Middle East peace and the Golan

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¶10. (C) Bush asked whether a resolution in the Golan Heights issue might "pull Syria out of Iran's orbit," an assessment which Khalifa agreed had merit. A solution to Golan would help with the situations in Iraq and Lebanon as well, he noted, adding the caveat that "the heart of the problem in the Middle East remains the Palestinian issue." Khalifa said that unfortunately the Quartet was not effective in taking concrete steps to calm the situation. He said the EU had an important role to play, but that the U.S. role is clearly more important on complicated issues of this nature. It is important that the U.S. be seen around the world as a guarantor of Israeli and Palestinian security "without taking sides," emphasized Khalifa.

¶11. (C) Bush lamented the international perception in some quarters that the U.S. is against Islam, to which Khalifa said only certain "ignorant" elements harbored this view. The majority know the U.S. is not against Islam, he stated. He agreed that the U.S. might do a better job of explaining its positions, but that greater effort to solve the critical Middle East issues of Israel-Palestine, the Golan, and Iraq was where American energy really needed to focus.

#### Lebanon and Syria

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¶12. (C) Khalifa, asked about his relationship with Syrian President Bashar Al Asad, said the UAE tried to maintain good relations with "all players," including the Syrians. His

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government had invited Bashar to visit, a trip which Khalifa said would soon take place. In Lebanon, he said the UAE maintains good relations with PM Siniora and his government but also with Aoun -- whose planned visit to the UAE has temporarily been delayed. "Even Nasrallah can come," said Khalifa, asserting again the UAE "policy" of keeping contact with all sides in order to play a positive role.

¶13. (C) Lebanon's historic problems are many, said Khalifa, calling that country the victim of everyone else trying to solve their problems on Lebanese soil. Iraq, Syria, and now Iran "export (their) problems to be resolved in Lebanon." Lebanon used to be peaceful and remains one of the most beautiful places in the world, according to Khalifa, who admired a land with mountains to resort to in the heat of the summer. Khalifa said the UAE sought stability in Lebanon, but also in the world generally "to ensure prosperity and good living." He appreciated Bush's comment about quality of life in the GCC, adding that the UAE offered a particularly good lifestyle for its citizens.

#### Cautious steps towards democracy

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¶14. (C) On the UAE's cautious steps towards democracy, Khalifa said the nation was moving forward "in compliance with our heritage and customs." (Note: Similar points have been highlighted in extensive media coverage of Khalifa's recent interview with Al Sharq Al Awsat, in which the President notes the need for cautious evolution towards

democracy. Khalifa's interview will be reported septel. End note.)

Katrina relief

¶15. (C) Accepting Bush's thanks for the UAE's contribution after Hurricane Katrina, Khalifa used the Arabic phrase "no need to thank me for doing my duty." UAE support was "truly out of friendship" to the American people, he said, and the UAE wished it could do even more -- having found it cumbersome to send supplies directly, the UAE had made a financial donation instead (\$100 million).  
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